

# Happiness Beyond Height



Knowledge  
to grow by

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As a parent, you do your best to teach your child about the world. You try to help your child feel happy and confident about his or her place in it. You help your child deal with the wonders and the challenges of life.

You also teach your child how to handle problems he or she may have. Part of this is teaching your child self-confidence. To do this, try looking at life from your child's point of view. Think about your child's strengths and experiences. With this insight, you can guide your child to a happy, well-adjusted life.

One challenge for some children is being smaller than others their age. Certain things at home and in other places may be hard to reach, especially for younger children. This may cause frustration or sadness. Some short children may be teased. They may feel self-conscious about their height.

As a parent, you can help your child deal with these issues. In this brochure, you will find suggestions for helping shorter children handle life challenges in a healthy way.

# Happiness beyond height

## Understanding short stature

What does it mean if the doctor says your child has short stature? It means that your child is shorter than average for his or her age group. There are many reasons for a child to be shorter than average.

### **Some reasons for short stature are:**

- **Being short runs in the family**

In some cases, a child may be short simply because being short runs in the family. This is called familial short stature.

- **The child is a late bloomer**

Sometimes, a child is short because he or she is a late bloomer. This child has a natural delay in development. The child grows more slowly than other children his or her age. This is called constitutional delay of growth.

- **The child has a medical issue that affects growth**

Some medical issues can cause poor growth. Growth hormone deficiency is one such medical condition in children. It means that a child's body does not make enough growth hormone. Growth hormone is needed for growth during childhood. Not enough growth hormone can cause poor growth in children.

## Handling the physical challenges of short stature

The clearest challenge for children with short stature is the trouble they may have reaching objects in their physical environment. Short children may have trouble reaching food in cabinets or objects on high shelves. They may have trouble getting in and out of a high bed. Some may have trouble riding bikes or even climbing stairs. This may be frustrating for younger children.

You can help your child deal with these physical challenges. Consider your child's experience. Create a plan for making the environment accessible to your child. Make a list of situations that may be difficult. Think of your child's environment both inside and outside the home. This includes areas around the house, school, and even the car. Come up with ways to help your child function in these environments.



## At home

Of all places, home is where your child should feel most comfortable. Arrange your home environment with your child's height in mind. Try to make your child comfortable and less conscious of his or her size. Think about your child's activities around the house. Come up with ways to make things in the house easier for him or her to use.

For example, put cereal and other things that your child uses often on low shelves. Consider using boxes, stools, or stepladders to help your child reach high shelves. You could attach string to light switches to make them easier to reach. Here are more examples of changes you can make:

- Lower closet rods for easy access to clothing
- Place mattresses on the floor instead of on a bed frame
- Adapt the car for a short teenaged driver

## At school

Think about your child's experience in places outside the home, especially school. For example, the following may be challenging for some short children:

- Reaching door handles
- Hanging a backpack on a hook or hanger
- Reaching the chalkboard
- Drinking at a water fountain
- Climbing stairs

Talk to your child's teachers or principal about making changes to your child's school environment so that size is not an issue. For example, your child may use a stool to reach the chalkboard. But be sure not to treat your child's small size as a handicap. You are simply making sure that your child is able to do what he or she needs to.

### **Help your child have a good attitude about being short**

Approach these changes with a spirit of confidence and a sense of humor. Teach your child to be a problem solver. Help your child feel pride in being able to adapt to his or her environment.

Explain that this is what it means to take care of oneself. Let your child know that this is a natural part of life. It is normal to find solutions to physical challenges. It is normal for people to change things to meet their needs. People build ladders to reach the side of tall buildings. Some people use stools to reach high shelves. There is really no difference.

## Handling the social challenges of short stature

Children may face different challenges at each stage of growth. The school years may pose special challenges. During this time, children are learning about the world. They are learning how to get along with others who are the same age. Children who are shorter than average may face social challenges due to their size.

People may think height ties in with attractiveness or importance. Some people may view taller as better. During the years of high school dating, being taller may seem more desirable, especially for boys. This does not mean that all short children will have a tough time. Being short may never be an issue.

Still, some short children may have problems during grade school and high school. They may have problems interacting with their peers due to their small size. They may have trouble fitting in.





## Younger children

Early in life, short children may be treated according to the age their height makes them seem instead of their real age. Some parents may even be less strict with shorter children. This is because short children may look younger due to their small size. This may be especially true for toddlers. A 4-year-old child who looks more like a 2-year-old child may be treated according to his or her perceived age.

Children who are treated this way may respond by acting younger. This may slow their emotional development, leading to less maturity than is expected for the child's age. Be aware of this. Make sure you do not baby or overprotect your child. Treat your child according to his or her age. This will set the tone for how your child relates to others.

## Teenagers

Being short may be especially tough for teenagers. High school is a time when many teenagers are defining themselves and may start to have interest in the opposite sex. Shorter teenagers may feel they have trouble fitting in socially. Getting a date for a school dance or making a sports team may be hard. They may not feel that other teenagers respect them. Some may feel lonely or sad.

You can help your teenaged child deal with social challenges. Help your child to find social activities where he or she can make new friends. Teach your child to focus on other human traits besides size or appearance. Does your child have a talent or hobby such as playing an instrument or a sport? Inspire your child to develop skills or to do activities that build self-esteem.

## Solutions and ideas

As a parent, you can help your child deal effectively with social challenges. You can foster a positive self-image. Teach your child to focus on positive personality traits instead of on physical height. Avoid overprotecting your child. Guide your child so he or she can develop strong ways to deal with social issues.

You can encourage fun social activities that give your child new chances to make friends. This lets your child interact with peers in a positive way and develop self-esteem. Teach your child to be assertive. Help your child develop skills for handling his or her short stature in public and social settings. For example, teach your child how to respond to questions and comments about his or her short stature.

## Dealing with teasing

You can teach your child skills for coping with teasing and bullying. If teasing is an issue, be sure to listen to your child. Find out:

- How severe is the teasing?
- How often does it happen?
- Who teases your child?
- What brings on the teasing?

Explain that teasing says more about the person who teases than about the person being teased. The bully is the one with the problem, not your child. Tell your child how to stand up for himself or herself. Teach your child a list of responses to negative comments about height. Your child should always respond in a strong, confident voice.

For example, what if another child, or even an adult, questions your child's age? Someone may ask whether your 7-year-old child is 5 years old. Your child should firmly respond, "No. I am 7 years old." He or she might add, "I am just small for my age."

Suppose another child makes a mean comment about your child's height. Then your child should say in a strong voice, "So what?" This sends the message that size is not a problem for your child. Your child could also say:

- "I like my size. I don't care what you think."
- "There is nothing wrong with my size."
- "Size does not matter."



If your child is a bit older, in middle school or high school, he or she might say:

- “I may not be tall, but you need to grow up!”
- “Is this all you have to talk about?”
- “This is getting old.”

If teasing is severe, consider telling a teacher or other authority figure. Have this person step in to make it stop. In some cases, you may even talk with the parents of the bully.

If you are present when a comment is made, make sure you do not step in. Let your child handle it. Afterward, praise your child. You might say, “I am proud of you. I like the way you handled that.” This reinforces what you have taught your child and helps to build confidence. It sends the message that your child is a strong person who can take care of himself or herself.

### **Life with growth hormone deficiency**

In some cases of short stature, a child’s doctor may feel that medical treatment will help a child. The doctor may suggest growth hormone therapy. This is treatment with daily injections of synthetic, or man-made, growth hormone. This is growth hormone made in a lab. It is identical to human growth hormone.

Families and children dealing with growth hormone deficiency face the challenges of living with daily growth hormone injections. The treatment may last from childhood into adulthood. The therapy is part of everyday life. This means the family will need to adjust to daily treatment. Key decisions include when and how to tell people outside the family, like teachers or friends, and how to manage therapy when traveling.

### **Coping with growth hormone therapy for the growth hormone deficient child**

A child with growth hormone deficiency may feel that something is wrong with his or her body. A child may feel ashamed of having to take injections every day. Tell your child that he or she is just fine. But sometimes people's bodies need help. If a person's body needs food, then the person eats food. If a person's body needs growth hormone, then the person gets growth hormone shots.

Explain that the treatment is nothing to be ashamed of. Let your child know that the therapy will help his or her body work as well as possible.

Explain that growth hormone therapy will help your child grow as tall as he or she was meant to grow. But make sure your child knows that there is nothing wrong with being short.



## Whom to tell

Growth hormone deficiency and growth hormone treatment may be touchy subjects for your child. Because of this, be aware of your child's feelings about therapy. A key issue is when to tell others about the treatment and when to keep it private. Talk with your child about this.

Let your child know that growth hormone therapy is nothing to be ashamed of. At the same time, explain that it can be kept private. If the choice is not to tell, then be clear that it is not a secret, but something personal that your child can keep to himself or herself.

Keep in mind that some people need to know about your child's treatment for the safety of your child. For example, all of your child's doctors should know.

If you and your child decide to keep treatment private, make sure that other family members, like brothers and sisters, respect the decision.

## Support your child

As a parent, it is important to have a strong, supportive relationship with your child. Be aware of your own feelings about your child's short stature. Do you feel sad, frustrated, or resentful? Be honest about how you feel. Be aware of how you interact with your child. This will help you be as supportive as possible.


Think of your child's feelings. The self-esteem of children with short stature has much to do with how they see their bodies. Children who feel good about themselves and who feel loved by their families may feel fine about their short stature.

Still, a short child may face emotional challenges because of height. For example, other people may have trouble accepting that everyone is different. They may act as if it is better to be tall. This may be hurtful to some short children.

For these reasons, remember to support your child. Make sure your child knows that he or she is just fine. Let your child know that any problems will pass. Explain that height does not matter. To reach high things, people use ladders or stools. To make friends, people are friendly and kind. None of these things depend on height. Tell your child that a person's worth has nothing to do with height. But it has everything to do with who that person is.



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